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van der Heiden, Nico

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Zimmermann, Karsten; Heinelt, Hubert (2012): Metropolitan Governance in Deutschland. Regieren in Ballungsräumen und neue Formen politischen Steuerung

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Nico van der Heiden

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This book takes up a longstanding scientific debate about metropolitan governance, i.e. the way functionally integrated but politically separated urban areas should be governed. The traditional dispute between metropolitan reformers seeking consolidation and exponents of public choice in favor of keeping fragmentation has been a long and unsettled one. It is noted correctly that the recent debate has shifted towards a third approach to metropolitan governance often labeled as “new regionalism”. Due to the strengthened role of urban areas as nodal points of a globalized economy, questions of metropolitan governance have gained importance over the last three decades. The book fits nicely in the debate on metropolitan governance and the broader debate about the rescaling of statehood.

This book’s empirical puzzle is why the institutional solutions to overcome problems in metropolitan areas differ widely, although the problems metropolitan areas face are

nearly similar for all these areas. Institutional arrangements differ greatly between German metropolitan areas, as the authors convincingly show.

The book starts with an introduction to current metropolitan governance trends in Germany. The authors correctly note that “[metropolitan] governance in German urban areas is more than ever an arrangement that is characterized by a flexible political geometry of the involved actors, of the institutional structures, and of the areas” (p. 10). The authors introduce the concept of metropolitan politics (“Metropolitenpolitik”) which they define as “the forming of certain metropolitan governance arrangements, [but also] their reproduction and their further development to include the thereby linked processes of negotiations and decision making” (p. 12). Zimmermann and Heinelt link this concept of metropolitan politics to a recent scientific debate on “meta-governance”, which they define as the “struggle about what the problem [of a metropolitan area] is that should be dealt with through collective action” (p. 11). Applying the meta-governance approach to metropolitan areas is certainly the added value of this book from a theoretical point of view.

The second chapter further reflects on the theoretical arguments used to analyze metropolitan governance. In a short and concise way, the framework for analysis is presented: besides (1) the governance arrangement itself, the authors are looking at the (2) democratic quality and (3) the effectiveness of the governance arrangements. Whereas effectiveness—or output legitimacy—has been a criterion for metropolitan governance for decades, the question of the democratic quality of the decision making procedure—the input legitimacy—of metropolitan governance arrangements is newer. The authors nicely show the interlinkages between these two aspects of—in my view—equal importance.

Dr. N. van der Heiden (✉)
ZDA – Zentrum für Demokratie Aarau,
ADF – Allgemeine Demokratieforschung, Universität Zürich,
Villa Blumenhalde, Küttigerstraße 21, 5000 Aarau, Schweiz
e-mail: nico.vanderheiden@zda.uzh.ch

The third chapter presents a historical overview of urban-rural relations in Germany since 1912. The historical overview is theoretically guided and concise. The fourth chapter presents insights from the five metropolitan areas under scrutiny (Hannover, Frankfurt/Rhein-Main, Munich, Rhein-Neckar, and Stuttgart). For each of these urban areas, the governance arrangement, its democratic quality, and its effectiveness are described. The rather detailed information in this chapter might be worthwhile for readers interested in the development within single urban areas. Readers interested in the more theoretically relevant issues might skip this chapter.

The fifth chapter then tackles the question how to explain the differences between the five German urban areas' governance arrangements. Unfortunately, the hypotheses are presented here only after the case studies, instead of integrating them in the theoretical part of the book. Many of the independent variables tested do, according to the authors, not explain the differences of the governance arrangements. There are for example effective mono-centric as well as effective polycentric metropolitan areas. There are strongly institutionalized metropolitan governance arrangements in urban areas dominated by liberal parties and in urban areas dominated by conservative parties. The authors also test for the economic structure, for the income situation of municipi-

palities, for social disparities between municipalities, and for actor-specific factors (blocking actor coalitions, leadership, consensus orientation, and positive sum games). Unfortunately, we do not learn anything about the methodological approach the authors followed to test these hypotheses. It is thus sometimes unclear on what empirical basis the authors reached their conclusions concerning certain hypotheses, especially because some of the aspects tested in this chapter have not been mentioned in the respective case studies.

The sixth chapter concludes that metropolitan governance in Germany remains highly influenced by the municipalities. It is thus—contrary to other countries—a bottom up and path dependent approach metropolitan areas follow to solve their institutional problems. This partly explains the variance of institutional designs of metropolitan governance arrangements in Germany.

Overall, the book presents the state of the art of recent trends in metropolitan governance in Germany nicely. The meta-governance approach used in this book could well be applied to other metropolitan areas in Germany or elsewhere. The starting question why the institutional design differs so greatly between them is unfortunately only partially answered. There remains—as always—a need for more research in this respect.